

## Man and Woman in Medieval and Modern Philosophy

(Lublin Lecture II)

### 1. Short Review of Platonic Sex Unity and Aristotelian Sex Polarity

a. Plato: no significant philosophical differentiation between man and woman- therefore a fundamental equality based on premise of human identity residing primarily in sexless soul separate from the body.

|            | <u>man</u>                   | <u>woman</u> |
|------------|------------------------------|--------------|
| opposites  | same nature                  |              |
| generation | same soul reincarnated       |              |
| wisdom     | same mind and knowledge      |              |
| virtue     | same function and excellence |              |

b. Aristotle: yes to significant philosophical differentiation between man and woman- but also argued for a fundamental superiority of man over woman on the basis of the fact of heat and cold and production of seed in materiality

|            | <u>man</u> | <u>woman</u>      |
|------------|------------|-------------------|
| opposites: | superior   | privation         |
|            | contrary,  | inferior contrary |
|            | hot,       | cold,             |
|            | fertile    | infertile         |

|             |                   |                      |
|-------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| generation: | perfect           | imperfect            |
|             | formation         | formation            |
|             | from seed         | from material        |
|             | of father         | of mother resisting  |
|             |                   | seed of father       |
| wisdom:     | rational soul     | rational soul        |
|             | capable of ruling | without authority    |
|             | irrational soul   | over irrational soul |
|             | wisdom,           | opinion              |
| virtue:     | rule by nature    | obey by nature       |
|             | public speech     | private silence      |

c. These two lines of the philosophy of man and woman remained dominant through the next several centuries. Most philosophers simply selected one or another aspect of the above theories to incorporate into their own thought. There were some adjustments, such as Lucretius' (98-55BC) suggesting a double seed theory of generation, and Galen (131-201) suggesting that female seed existed, but that it was infertile, or Juvenal (60-140) adding a satirical flavor to sex polarity. And Philo (13BC-54AD), in spite of his admiration for Plato developed a consistent theory of sex polarity in his exegetical texts.

Porphyry (233-305) made a direct connection between the Platonic theory of the body as a prison for the sexless soul and the sex unity position in a letter to his wife Marcella: "For we are bound in the chains that nature has cast around us, by the belly, the throat and the other parts of the body...Neither trouble thyself much whether thou be male or female in body, nor look on thyself as a woman, for I did not approach thee as such." (33) There were also several women philosophers within the neo-Pythagorean tradition, and Hypatia (370-415) became the leader of the Alexandrian school of neo-Platonism which followed the openness of this school towards women who had the talent and desire to use their reason in a philosophical way.

However, there were no original arguments in the philosophy of woman and man after Plato and Aristotle until Christian philosophy began to develop. It was really the impact of Christian theology upon philosophy that suggested that the sex polarity theory or the sex unity theory were not adequate to explain the respective identities of the sexes. St. Augustine was the first to reflect on the significance of the belief in the resurrection of the body for the premises of sex complementarity, namely that there are significant differences between men and women and the two sexes are equal in dignity and worth. I will go into his theory in greater detail in Lecture 4 when we consider the relation of philosophy to theology of man and woman, but at this point I will just mention that Augustine had a triple theory

of sex identity: sex polarity for married women and men, sex unity for religious, and sex complementarity for the saints in heaven.

## 2. Hildegard of Bingen as the Foundress of the Philosophy of Sex Complementarity

Hildegard (1098-1179) was the first western thinker to begin to elaborate a philosophy of sex complementarity across all four categories of opposites, generation, wisdom, and virtue. While she is better known for her mystical writings, her music, drama, and scientific treatises, Hildegard was in fact quite a philosopher. In Causae et Curae, translated into German as Heilkunde, or the Healing Arts, Hildegard dedicates several chapters to a consideration of the nature of man and of woman from the perspective of reason and the observation of the senses.

She employs the medieval theory of the interaction of the four elements and four humours to explain why men and women are different from one another, or why in other respects they are similar. While today we would not accept elements and humours as a scientific basis for analysing human identity, what is impressive about Hildegard's thought is that she sought always to bring a balance into the context of traditional sex polarity theory which affirmed that there are significant differences between men and woman, and yet she also affirmed that women and men were equal in dignity and worth. In addition, she did not

fall into the error of sex unity, which took the fact of equality to argue that there were no significant differences between men and women. Therefore, Hildegard is rightfully identified as the foundress of the philosophy of sex complementarity.

opposites: In Aristotelian cosmology the elements were arranged in a hierarchical order beginning with fire, air, water, and ending with earth. In his view the male, as being associated with greater heat, lightness, activity, was more like the two highest elements fire and air; and the female, in her association with the colder, heavier, passive was more like the two lowest elements of water and earth, although all existing things had a mixture of form and matter in their substantial being.

While Hildegard accepted the Aristotelian ordering of the four elements, she argued that the male was more like fire and earth, and the female like air and water. Her evidence for these claims was the heaviness of the male body, his greater hairiness, and the air that was needed in the female body for gestation. She also invoked theological arguments, namely that Adam was created from the earth to support the connection between men and the element earth. This appeal to scriptural authority was supported usually by her own observations, as the following passage demonstrates: "The woman, however, did not experience such a transformation [as Adam], taken from flesh, she remained flesh. That is why...she is so to speak an airy being, for it is her

task to bear the child to maturity and to give it birth. She also has a cloven skull and thinner skin so that the child she carries in her womb may get air." (H. 124).

So Hildegard brought a balance into the discussion of opposites by suggesting that the male was associated with the highest and lowest of the elements, and the female with the two middle elements. Neither sex was superior to the other, but there was a significant difference.

generation: In a similar way, Hildegard accepted the Aristotelian theory of generation as modified by Porphyry and Galen, but she shifted what originally led to a polarity and brought about a new balance. She agreed with Aristotle that the female was naturally more cool than the male, but she claimed that this was due to the greater presence of air. Even so, she argues that the warmth of the female body heats the male seed to bring it to its full development as a fetus: "[The man's] blood pours into the woman a cold foam which then congeals in the warmth of the motherly tissue, taking on that blood-mixed state. In the beginning the foam remains in the warmth and later is maintained by the dry humors of the motherly nourishment, growing into a dry, miniature-like form of the human being." (H 125) So in generation neither sex is superior to the other, but there is a significant difference in functions that lead to new life.

Hildegard presented a philosophy of integration of body and soul that separated her from the dualistic Platonic tradition. Her works abound in metaphors for complete integration. For example, "the soul...permeates the entire body just as water flows through the entire Earth," or the soul "wanders through this form like a caterpillar spinning silk." (H 102, DW 11) Needless to say, she also affirmed the Christian theological premise of sex complementarity: "All men in the twinkling of an eye shall rise again in body and in soul without any contradiction of cutting off their members, but in the integrity of their bodies and their sex." (H 365)

wisdom: It is perhaps in the category of wisdom that Hildegard makes her most original contribution to the history of the philosophy of man and woman. She argues that self knowledge is crucial to human development, and elaborates four different types of men and four different types of women as a way of contributing to this effort to know the self. Most surprising is that she gives a 'phenomenological analysis' of the experience of one sex by the other in the depths of consciousness.

While there is no time here to elaborate her theory in detail, she describes a type 1 male who has too much fire which leads to the attempt to possess forcefully what or who he desires, and a type 2 who has more air and who is therefore more balanced. The second type of man "with women can have an honorable and fruitful relationship. The eyes of such men can

meet squarely with those of women, much in contrast to those other men's eyes which were fixed on them like arrows." (H 140) The second type of man has "a wisdom that takes its beautiful self-control from the female element [air], for they are in possession of a sensible understanding." (H 140)

The 3rd type of man actively dislikes women, and he acts with total unrestraint due to the presence of black bile. She concludes: "They are incapable of having a genuine loving relationship with any being." (H 140) The 4th type of man is weak in all respects because he has too little of any of the elements. In an interesting way, Hildegard concludes that this type of man is not able to lead an effective married or spiritual life: "Because they demonstrate such deficiencies in their bodily condition, they are also awkward in drafting their spiritual world." (H 142)

Hildegard's analysis of the four types of women is even more detailed. She brings together reflections on muscularity, type of blood, skin color, fertility, quality of menstruation, diseases after menopause with an analysis of character. The four types following the general lines of: type 1: artistic, 2: efficient, 3: intellectual, and 4: unstable and ill-humoured. To just give one example of her integrated approach to woman's identity, in the following passage she describes the 'intellectual' type of woman: " Then there are women who have delicate flesh but a



course bone structure and whose vessels are moderately developed, carrying dry, reddish blood. Their complexion is pale. They are intelligent and benevolent; they are honored by people and are thus respected. During their menstruation they suffer from a loss of blood. Their uterus is well-developed and they are fertile. Although men like their way of living, then shun them a bit, for such women attract them, it is true, but do not know how to captivate them...If the monthly bleeding sets out ahead of time, they easily become paralyzed and diffuse in their humors, such that the whole organization of humors becomes ineffective. Then they turn liverish or fall ill with black 'dragon' humors or develop tumors in the breast." (H 145)

Again while there is no time to go into Hildegard's complex analysis here, this example demonstrates Hildegard's theory of the intimate integration of body and of soul. She is reaching towards a theory of the individual, which does not get fully developed until the 19th century, although it had its roots in Boethius' definition of a person as an individual substance of a rational nature, and St. Augustine's personal reflections in the Confessions. What makes Hildegard stand out is her attempt to offer a philosophical analysis of the complex phenomenon of human interaction, and in particular of the respective identities of men and women. She consistently brings a balance into her discussion so that neither sex is by nature superior to the other, and at the same time they manifest philosophically

significant differences. So instead of polarity, or unity, she is seeking a philosophical ground for complementarity.

However, it should also be pointed out that Hildegard's complementarity is what I call 'fractional' rather than 'integral'. This means that she did not yet have the concept of a person, as an integral whole. Consequently, she referred to the union of man and woman in terms of fractional relationship, so that their combination made just one being. Each supplied a part that was missing in the other. It will not be until the twentieth century that the philosophy of person will be sufficiently established to provide a solid philosophical foundation for integral sex complementarity.

virtue Even in this area, Hildegard brought about a shift in emphasis to bring polarity into complementarity. In the polarity theory woman had to obey man because her nature was inferior to his. For Hildegard, however, woman chooses to obey man because it is a higher good. She says: "She was formed from the flesh of man; therefore she is subject to him, it is true, but she is in a much greater position of quiescence." (H. 93) The important point to note is that while in Aristotle's theory woman's reason was 'without authority' over her emotions, and therefore she had to obey a man who had that internal government, for Hildegard woman is more self governed than man, so her obedience is not out of necessity of an inferiority of nature. It may come from a choice

to live out of a relationship of gift of self to another, which moves towards personal actualization in a fuller sense. This is, of course, the basis for the evangelical counsel of obedience that we practice in religious life.

In the area of activity in public and private spheres, Hildegard also broke open the ranges by travelling and speaking publically all over Germany between the years 1158-1170. So in all areas Hildegard tried to defend a fractional sex complementarity. It is possible to suggest that she may have had the experience of complementarity in her double monastery within the Benedictine tradition at Mount St. Disibode, of men and women studying together in contrast to the polarity tradition in which women were excluded from study, or the unity tradition in which women were present in the male academy, but tended to lose their sex identity. This will be significant for the next major shift in western thought about the identities of men and women.

### 3. The Aristotelian Revolution in Academic Philosophy and its effect on the Philosophy of Man and Woman

When we ask why it was that sex complementarity did not become well established in western thought, particularly since it seemed so compatible with Christian theology of the resurrection of the body, we have to look at the way in which Aristotelianism became institutionalized in the western academic system. Aristotle's logical writings were the first to be translated into

Syriac, Arabic, and the Latin. By the ninth century most of his works were translated into Arabic, and by the thirteenth century they were all available to the Latin reader. By this route Aristotle began to be discovered first by the Islamic philosophers Avicenna (980-1037) and Averroes (1126-1198). Avicenna supported a sex polarity in the category of opposites, wisdom, and virtue and a modified sex polarity in the theory of generation in that he argued the female provides a weak seed and a secondary formative power in generation. Averroes developed a two tiered theory of sex identity in which philosophy supported a sex unity position similar to the Platonic line, while religion, as a lower form of knowledge, supported a sex polarity position.

The Jewish philosopher Maimonides (1135-1204) discovered Aristotle through the Islamic philosophers, various commentators, and Galen, and he adopted a thorough going sex polarity in both his Guide and his medical texts.

Next, the Christian philosophers St. Albert the Great (1193-1280) discovered Aristotle through Maimonides, and he determined to elaborate a new Christian philosophy based on Aristotelian premises. Not surprisingly, this led to a thorough defense for sex polarity in his writings on the nature of woman and man. He added an emphasis on the opposites dry and moist as well as hot and cold to explain woman's general inferiority to man, and to explain why her intelligence was weaker, and her appetites moved

towards evil. St. Albert did introduce an important qualification of the Aristotelian theory in two ways: 1) the view that woman was an 'accidental man' (mas occasionatus) was limited to refer only to particular nature in which "the active element principally intends to produce the male". Universal nature, on the other hand, "intends the female, as that without which the species cannot be saved." (QSA XV, 2). 2) St. Albert's great love for Our Lady led him to develop a theology of Mary which on the level of grace, and of her complete perfection in her nature, made her superior to all human beings.

The claim that on the level of grace, nature was transformed then became an essential aspect of the thought of St. Albert's student St. Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274). While accepting the Aristotelian theory of sex polarity on the level of nature, St. Thomas developed a thorough theological framework for sex complementarity on the level of grace. He argued that two sexes were more perfect than one, in the resurrection both sexes will be present in their perfection, differentiation, and equality, both sexes are equally capable of infused wisdom, and the perfection of the theological virtues. At the same time, on the level of nature, woman was naturally inferior to man in her lack of 'eminence of degree,' her weaker reason, and her weaker capacities in the practice of cardinal virtues. The relation of philosophy to theology will be considered in greater detail in the 4th lecture in this series, so at this point it is only

necessary to note that St. Thomas, while accepting the basic Aristotelian premises, did qualify them on the level of grace.

It was St. Thomas' student, Giles of Rome (1243-1316), who reasserted a strict Aristotelian theory of sex polarity and who really pressed for an absolute theory of sex polarity. In any event, it was through the powerful combination of Islamic, Jewish, and Christian philosophers, who found in Aristotle the philosophical foundation for their own philosophy, that the rationale for sex polarity followed along as a secondary effect of the Aristotelian revolution. Consequently, along with all the very positive theories of Aristotle in logic, science, metaphysics, ethics, politics, etc., also came a full blown defence for sex polarity.

At the same time as the original texts of Aristotle's works were becoming available to the Latin reader, the location of higher education was shifting away from the Benedictine monasteries where it had resided for the past several centuries towards new academic centres within cities. These centers were being established by Bishops to train the clerics in mendicant orders who were being newly founded at the time. The most significant of these was the University of Paris, established in the early 1200's. By 1254 the university was formed into four faculties: Arts for undergraduates, and Theology, Medicine, and Law for graduates, and by the end of the century Aristotle had

become the central philosopher studied in all four faculties. St. Albert taught at the University of Paris from 1243-1248 "making Aristotle intelligible to the Latins". St. Thomas taught there from 1252-1259 and from 1269-1272, and Giles of Rome from 1285-1295.

It is important to point out that the theory of sex polarity was not the only consequence of the insertion of Aristotelian thought into Academic philosophy. In the undergraduate Faculty of Arts another equally significant effect of the influence of Aristotelianism was to introduce a new approach to sex identity, or what I call sex neutrality. This approach is based upon Aristotelian logic, in which the human being as such is considered as the primary subject of study, falling under the first category of 'substance' and being approached through the universal 'genus' and 'species'. Sexual differentiations are considered accidental in that they have to inhere in a substance, i.e. male and female as an accident of the substance 'man'. Within this view, issues of sex identity were not properly considered to be a subject of philosophy, except in so far as they fell into the looser category of natural philosophy which studies accidental as well as essential differences. \*

As will be seen, sex neutrality became the dominant position of academic philosophy, reinforced by a mathematical and mechanistic Cartesian approach, until the twentieth century. Even

\* Also natural philosophy focused on what was 'usually' or 'for the most part' the case (Metaph 1065a2-6) while logic focused on what was 'always' the case, shifting a general or probable definition to a necessary and sufficient one. (Principia Anal. (41b6-10))

with the condemnations of Aristotle's works in the early thirteenth century, the logical texts remained as part of the curriculum. \*\*

In 1255 a major turning point occurred in the history of the philosophy of woman and man. "It was in 1255 that Aristotle's Physics, interdicted until then under pain of excommunication, was officially authorized at Paris, simultaneously with his metaphysics, the work De Animalibus and the treatise of the soul: in a word, all of the greater and lesser works of the Greek philosopher which hence forward entered, in their totality and triumphality, into the university schools, to exercise there for several centuries an intellectual domination, whose equal it would be impossible to find in the history of human thought." \* (Compayré 179) Of course, it is through the texts on animals, the ethics, and the politics that the fundamental arguments for sex polarity were transmitted; And in the Organon, or logical texts that the fundamental attitude of sex neutrality was transmitted. So there was the double effect of the institutionalization of sex polarity and sex neutrality through the Aristotelian revolution in the philosophy of man and woman.

In addition, the structure and curriculum in Paris was used as a model for all of the universities that were founded across Europe for the next three centuries, (While Solerno, Bologna, and Oxford were established by this time, we have in the 13th c. Cambridge, Montpellier, Padua, Naples, Avignon, Toulouse,

\* These works became required reading for all undergraduates in the faculty of Arts

\*\* The method in philosophical studies became the syllogism which used universal and necessary premises.



Salamanca, Curia Romana, Valencia, Seville and Lisbon; and in the 14th c. Dublin, Prague, Florence, Cracow, Vienna, Cologne, and Heidelberg, in order of founding. All new universities followed Paris in structure and content of curriculum. In this way, Aristotelian rational for both sex neutrality and sex polarity was institutionalized all across Europe in all the new universities.

The sex neutrality tradition was supported by Robert Grosseteste (1175-1253) who introduced Aristotle's logic to Oxford after writing his commentary on Prior Analytics. Roger Bacon (1214-1292) continued the sex neutrality focus of Aristotelian works in his attempt to found philosophy on a mathematical method at Oxford. The William of Ockham (c. 1285-1439) continued the sex neutrality trend there through his emphasis on nominal definitions, the rejection of universal forms, and the shift of philosophy from the study of the real world to the study of terms, although there is a hint of an argument for sex equality in his political works.\*

Aristotle's works were used to justify sex polarity in all four faculties, as careful research will bear out. In this way, the claim that women are by nature inferior to men became the established theory in Medicine, Law, Theology, and Philosophy in all academic centres. However, it should be mentioned in passing that John Duns Scotus (c. 1266-1308), who taught at both Paris and Oxford sought to moderate Aristotelian sex polarity on

\* (It was the Ockhamist school of Aristotelianism that dominated the University in Cracow in the 15th century)

strictly philosophical grounds. Following Avicenna he argued that the female seed had a secondary role in the formation of the fetus, although he did claim that the male had the primary formative role, and God gave the plurality of forms of individual women and men, or the form of the life of the existent.

The unfortunate consequence of what I call 'The Aristotelian Revolution' in the philosophy in Academic centres led to the displacement both of the theories of sex unity which ~~was~~ part of the Platonic tradition and of sex complementarity which had been part of the Christian monastic tradition. All that remained was rationale for sex neutrality or sex polarity.

In addition, because the universities were established for mendicant orders, women were excluded from studying there. This led to the further unfortunate result that the theories of sex polarity were taught without any chance for interactive discussion among men and women as a possible corrective to errors. Suddenly, women had no access to the most important theories in philosophy, and the context of complement interaction with the great libraries in the monastic tradition as well as dialogue between men and women which had given Hildegard the context within which to develop her theory of sex complementarity were gone. Consequently, the Aristotelian Revolution dominated western thought and educational institutions for several hundred years.

#### 4. New theories of sex identity emerging outside of academia

During the next two or three hundred years there were two so-called counter academic cultural movements in which new theories of sex identity began to emerge: education of women within monastic communities, and the development of Renaissance Humanism. In these contexts, in addition to traditional forms of sex polarity, we begin to see new kinds of arguments presented for sex complementarity, and the origin of a new theory altogether, or reverse sex polarity.

#### Religious women writers

The earliest women religious writers simply gave a straightforward description of their religious experience. However, even with in these first order descriptive accounts could be seen philosophical arguments which particularly focused on the value of practicing self government, and living a life of virtue. The works of Beatrice (.1200-1268), Hadewijch (13th c.), Mechtild of Magedeburg (1210-1297), Mechtild of Hackeborn (c.1240-c.1298), and St. Gertrude (1235-1302) all fall within this category. So in a simple way these women, who were in dialogue with men through spiritual direction, contradicted the Aristotelian dictum that a woman's reason was 'without authority' over her emotions.

As the tradition progressed, uncontaminated by academic

philosophy, the women religious writers began to probe the depths of their consciousness to uncover new levels of thought and experience. They began to analyze their experience and in doing so discovered the power of analogical thinking. St. Bridget of Sweden's (1303-1373) analogies of home and clothing, St. Catherine of Siena's (1347-1380) analogy of the vertical bridge, and Julian of Norwich' (1343-1416) description of the substantial and sensual motherhood of Christ (R 293-4) all reveal a philosophical intelligence reaching for new ways to express a transcendental truth.

In addition Bridget, Catherine of Siena, Margery Kempe (1373-1423), and Catherine of Genoa (1447-1510) all wrote about their movements in the the public sphere of activity which also de facto challanged the Aristotlian separation of the public and private spheres of activity for the virtuous woman. However, the most significant of all of these original thinkers, was St. Teresa of Avila (1518-1582) whose texts and works continually stood out against the background of Aristotelian sex polarity. In particular, she developed a sophisticated analysis of religious experience using St. Augustine's distinction between the memory, understanding, and will that elaborated the different interaction of these faculties through seven different stages of spiritual consciousness. In one of her descriptions of the integration of contemplative and active life she says: "The will alone is in deep quiet; and the intellect and the memory, on the other hand,

are so free that they can attend to business affairs and engage in works of charity." (L, I; IC II) In another kind of consciousness, " God takes Himself the will and even the intellect... The memory remains free, but it seems to be joined to the imagination. And since it sees itself alone, the war it wages is something to behold...the imagination and memory carry on such a war that the soul is left powerless." (L. I)

Again one can see these writers struggling to do philosophical thinking outside of the Academic educational system. They are examples of women who have achieved a very high degree of discursive reasoning as counter examples to Aristotelian theory about woman's capacities. In addition, they pushed outwards the ranges of virtuous activity working in complement with religious men. St. Teresa's work of reform in the Carmelites is well known. The Ursuline Marie of the Incarnation's (1599-1672) work in New France is perhaps less well known, but she wrote the first anthropological texts about native life in complement with the Jesuit Relations, in addition to a spiritual autobiography that analyzed twelve different states of prayer.

Therefore, outside of academia within the religious Catholic tradition women were working in complement with men and in this way preparing a continued context for the flowering of a new theory of sex complementarity. \*

\* They gave witness against the fundamental Aristotelian claim that the female was passive in her nature in 3 ways: 1) self-reflection, 2) self-government and 3) public (virtuous) action.

### Renaissance Humanism

In a similar way we find in Renaissance humanism a progressive development of a model of woman which contradicts the fundamental premises of Aristotelian sex polarity. Beginning with Italian Renaissance humanism we find 1) the introduction of works written by men but at the request of women. Cavalcanti's Canzone d'amore was written to answer a woman's questions about several different philosophical aspects of love, and Leonardo Bruni's (1370-1444) De Studiis et Litteris was written to describe an education for a young girl which included instruction in philosophy.

The next stage of evolution in this movement was the writing of dialogues by men in which female figures played a role. Following in the tradition of Socrates' Diotima in the Symposium, or Boethius' Lady Philosophy in The Consolation of Philosophy, these female figures began to create a model of a feminine mode discursive reasoning. Petrarch's (1304-1374) Laura, and even Boccaccio's (1313-1375) seven women in the Decameron and his Lives of Famous Women added to this model of the wise woman teaching other women and men about the way to truth. Pietro Bembo's Gli Asolini, and Leone Hebreo's <sup>(d. 1513)</sup> dialogues on love are further examples of this phenomenon. In the latter text, Philo is described as a young man, unable to control his passions, until taught how to do so by the wisdom of Sophia, a feminine These

personification. These dialogues, with imaginary feminine models of wisdom began to create a context of interactive dialogue between women and men which countered the sex polarity model of sex identity in which philosophical discussion was reserved to men alone.

There were, of course, many renaissance humanist texts that simply repeated the Aristotelian theory of sex polarity, works by Alberti, Barbaro (1390-1454), Passi, and the Corbaccio of Boccaccio, for instance. However, new perspectives began to be articulated, and in the third stage of development men began to directly question Aristotle's presuppositions about sex identity. In the dialogue The Courtier Baltassare Castiglione (1478-1529) inserts one character who consistently attacks the premises of Aristotelian sex polarity. \*

This phenomenon may have helped the fourth stage of development within renaissance humanism, namely the direct writing of women philosophers. More significant perhaps is the fact that several of these women wrote directly about the question of sex identity, and they wrote from a philosophical perspective, using reason and the observation of the senses.

Christine de Pisan (1363-1461) who was born in Italy but immigrated to France wrote several texts, the most important of which for our purposes is Le Livre de la cité des dames, Le livre

\* Translated into Polish in 1566 as  
Dwozanin polski (The Polish courtier)

des trois vertus, Mutacion de Fortune, and her correspondence which initiated the infamous "Querelle des femmes", and in which she was supported by the Ockhamist Jean Gerson from the University of Paris. Her philosophical arguments were directed primarily at the satirical texts which had emerged out of the Aristotelian tradition into the popular culture about woman's inferiority in relation to man.

Next is Isotta Nogarola (1418-1466), whose dialogue De Pari aut Evae atque Adae Peccato used the reductio ab absurdum argument from Aristotelian premises to prove that Eve was less guilty of original sin than was Adam. Most important for our purposes, however, is Lucrezia Marinelli (1571-1653) whose over 300 page text La Nobilita et l'ccellenza delle donne, do'diffetti et mancamenti de gli huomini was the first systematic philosophical study, written either by a man or a woman, to argue throughout against Aristotelian sex polarity. Marinelli, who was an epic poet and political commentator of some distinction was also a very good philosopher, and she developed many different arguments to prove the inaccuracy of Aristotle's philosophy of man and woman. The first half of her text takes most of the Aristotelian virtues, and seeks to prove that woman is more virtuous than man in nearly every case; while the second half of the book takes examples of vices in Aristotelian theory, and tries to prove that men are worse than women in this range of ethical activity. \*

\*In addition to this empirical evidence, Marinelli also often appeals to the philosophical authority of Plato and neo-Platonism to defend her claims. This use of Platonic sex unity to counter Aristotelian sex polarity was common in Renaissance humanist texts.



Consequently, Marinelli concludes that empirical evidence demonstrates, using Aristotle's own premises, that woman is superior to man. For this reason I identify Lucrezia Marinelli as the foundress of the theory of reverse sex polarity. While Henreich Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1536) was the first to offer theological arguments for the superiority of woman over man, Marinelli is the first to offer philosophical arguments to prove this inverse of traditional sex polarity. In fact, it would seem that reverse sex polarity is always a reaction against traditional sex polarity. Marinelli sought to prove that particularly in the categories of wisdom and virtue that there are significant philosophical distinctions between the sexes, and that women are by nature superior to men. She considers women to have a calmer, more ordered disposition than men, with the irrational parts of the soul under the guidance and governance of the rational faculty. She supports her claim by appeal to empirical evidence gathered both from traditional authors and from her own experience in Venice. The tradition of reverse sex polarity will be seen as having a renewal in contemporary feminist philosophy in our discussion in lecture 3 and 4. At this point, however, we will summarize the main points of the effect of these two counter-academic-culture developments on the philosophy of man and woman.

- 1) In both situations a real dialogue between men and women

provided a context in which to challenge the premises of Aristotelian sex polarity in the categories of wisdom and virtue.

2) In addition women were seen to be a)self reflective, 2)self governing, and 3) capable of virtuous public action which countered traditional Aristotelian claims of their passivity, inabilities, and separate spheres for virtuous action.

3) There were beginnings of new theories of sex complementarity and reverse sex polarity which cut across Aristotelian sex polarity and sex neutrality by appealing to classical writers in the Platonic and stoic traditions.

4) While this was not discussed directly above, it should also be mentioned that within both women religious writers and renaissance humanist writers a new range of reflection on the meaning of masculine and feminine within the culture was beginning to occur. A man could be considered as having masculine or feminine characteristics, and a woman similarly. Often there was a prescriptive mode which was rather limited, i.e. a man ought not to be effeminate (see, Machiavelli especially for this), or a woman ought to be manly (meaning courageous, etc.), and yet within spiritual writings the positive side of a concept of feminine was also articulated (see, John of the Cross on the need to be feminine or receptive in relation to God. In fact, St. John and St. Teresa are excellent examples of individuals who were both masculine and feminine in their positive evaluation.)

The meaning of this development in the philosophy of woman and man, namely from a primary consideration of the male and

female to include also a consideration of the masculine and feminine from about the 1400th century on, will be discussed in further detail in Lecture 3 of this series. At this point we will turn to the next development in the response to the Aristotelian revolution, or the ways in which the new science attacked Aristotelian premises and undermined the authority of Aristotelian in general. This had the oblique effect of undermining the foundations of sex polarity also.

#### 4. The New Science Challenges Premises of Aristotelian Sex Polarity

During the 16th to 19th centuries fundamental aspects of Aristotelian theory of opposites and of generation were discovered to be false. The evidence for these discoveries came from two branches of new scientific techniques: mathematical calculations and empirical observations on the macroscopic scale, and empirical observations in anatomy on the microscopic scale. In this way, the empirical basis for Aristotelian sex polarity was discovered not to exist, and so the whole theory was put into question. We will consider briefly these developments in the two areas of cosmic generation, and continuity of human generation.

##### cosmic generation

Within the Aristotelian model of cosmology the earth was considered to be the passive, heavy center of the universe, and the sun as the active, hot generator. In Generation of Animals

Aristotle stated in the context of a discussion of the fact that a male 'generates in another' and a female 'generates in itself', "That is why in cosmology too they speak of the nature of the earth as something female and call it 'mother,' while they give to the heaven and sun and anything else of that kind the title of 'generator' and 'father'. (716a 9-17) There is, of course, a fundamental truth to this understanding of mothering and fathering which will be considered further in the 4th lecture on theology.

However, the difficulty for our purposes arose when the cosmic female was devalued also because of a perceived passivity. As Benedict Ashley, O.P. stated about the De Caelo, "The earth...remains stationary by reason of its ignobility and inertness. The earth for Aristotle is the dregs of the universe." (DC 311b 15-312a 22) Generation within the self is an active concept, but being the heavy static center of the circular motion of the planets is not. It was this latter view that particularly changed in the new science.

Aristotle's cosmology had been supported by mathematical calculations of Ptolemy (c.100-175) which held firm until the seventeenth century. The overturning of Ptolemy took place in three phases: 1) Copernicus (1473-1453), as is well known here in Poland, identified a triple motion of the earth: a rotation on its own axis, a rotation around the sun, and a declining or

tipping away and towards the sun. In defending his theory he argued directly against Aristotle and Ptolemy. It might be thought that this inversion of passive Mother Earth and active Father sun would have led to a revaluation of the polarity of the traditional cosmology. However, Copernicus concluded that it was more noble to be the stationary centre of the orbit of the earth and planets, so the sun was revalued as stationary Lord of the planets, superior to earth again.

2) Galileo's (1564-1642) 'enobling of mother earth' by defending a motion of the earth on its axis and its movement around the sun. Galileo also took away the organic life of the earth by considering it to be primarily similar to a magnetic stone, and he like Copernicus gave a new valuation to suns (of which he believed they were many), as stationary Kings of the planets.

3) Kepler (1571-1630) reaffirmed the significance of 'Father Sun' although his discovery that the motion of the earth was elliptical, rather than circular, shifted the polarity of the relation of cosmic father and cosmic mother. Now there had to be a third reference point outside of the two, so that the foci of the ellipse fell neither within the centre of the earth nor the centre of the sun. (Analogically we can reflect on the significance of this discovery for the relation of man, woman, and God in a theological context) In addition, Kepler discovered

in his three planetary laws, that there is a magnetic force of attraction between father son and mother earth, a discovery that later helped Newton identify the force of gravity. ( Again, there is potential for analogical application of these laws of nature to a cosmology of man and woman).

In spite of the revaluation of the superiority of the cosmic father over the cosmic mother in these theories, the "Copernican Revolution" in thought about the macrocosim had the effect of bringing a concept of activity to the cosmic mother earth, and in a subtle way began to shift thinking so that the cosmic female could be seen as really by nature including the concept of activity as fundamental to its identity. This had the effect of countering the Aristotelian model of passivity as the meaning of the nature of the female.

#### continuity of generation

A similar kind of revolution occurred in the new science of human generation. Aristotle had argued that the male provided the active form to generation, and the female provided the passive matter. The female, therefore, provided no seed, but only the material of blood, bones, and so forth. In addition, Aristotle had argued that the father's contribution to the fetus contained only form, which was completely non material, so there was a single seed for a child, a seed containing an immaterial form which would ideally generate a male child that resembled the

father.

The new science began with the practice of anatomy through the work in Italy of Mondino da Luzzi (1276-1328), Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), Andreas Vesalius (1514-1564), and Hieronymus Fabricius (1533-1619). By this time, the discovery of the female ovaries had been made, but their functioning was still not yet known. It was Fabricius' student William Harvey (1578-1657) who discovered that the female seed was a separately existing entity, and by the end of his career he proved its active function in generation, although all the previously mentioned anatomists had speculated that there existed active female seed. Harvey also discovered the circulation of the blood, which undermined further Aristotle's theory that male seed was the final product of blood 'boiled up' from the heat of the male body. However, Harvey also believed that the active seed of the male contained no material, while the female seed did, and so there was still an inaccuracy in his theory which supported a kind of polarity.

Just as the telescope had helped to confirm the Copernican Revolution in cosmic generation, so the microscope helped confirm the revolution in understanding of human generation. However, it was not until Karl Ernst von Baer (1792-1876) used the microscope that the existence of the female seed, or egg was scientifically confirmed. Further Antonj von Leeuwenhoek (1632-1723) discovered with the microscope the existence of multiple seeds in the male

semen and announced this discovery to the Royal Society in London in 1677. The full complexity of genetics was not confirmed until the last few centuries.

These scientific discoveries made their way back into discussions in academic institutions, and particularly in philosophical circles. For example, in England at Oxford, London, and Cambridge the consequences of these discoveries for the philosophy of man and woman were often part of public debate. Sir Thomas Browne (1605-1682) at Oxford lamented: "Today he [Aristotle] is bitterly cut to the quick by moderns and almost at the point of death: so that it seems to be that the peripatetic philosophy is now brought to a standstill and can hardly be rescued, or not even hardly." (CW III, 206)

Browne, Sir Kenelm Digby (1603-1665), Alexander Ross (1591-1654), and Nathaniel Highmore (1613-1685) all contributed to the debate about the relative merits of Aristotelian sex polarity in relation to modern science. For the most part, even when the conclusion that the female contributed active seed, or the male contributed material with his active seed was accepted a modified sex polarity entered into a new description of the relations between the two sexes. For example, Highmore argued that the female seed had more material atoms and was therefore weaker than the male seed which produced more spiritual atoms. In any event, empirical science did ultimately displace the Aristotelian



foundations for sex polarity in the category of opposites and of generation, and so it opened the way for new theories of sex identity to emerge. We will now turn to the final section of this study of the philosophy of man and women in medieval and modern philosophy, or a consideration of Descartes' effect on this area of study.

#### 5. The Cartesian Reformation in the Philosophy of Man and Woman

##### sex neutrality supported by mathematical method

The philosophy of René Descartes (1590-1650) had a similar double effect as had the philosophy of Aristotle on theories of sex identity. On the one hand, his mathematical approach to philosophical method, and the example of his own writings in which there is no direct reference to the philosophy of man and woman supported the theory of sex neutrality. This is even more striking when it is considered that some of his most famous correspondants were women. In fact, it seems to be the case that the Cartesian foundation for sex neutrality reinforced the Aristotelian base in logic for this same theory, and that academic philosophy was dominated by this sex neutrality orientation until the late 20th century.

##### sex unity supported by mind/body dualism

The second effect of Cartesian philosophy was to provide a

new metaphysical basis for dualism, and for the separation of mind and body which in turn offered a new rational for sex unity. In the Meditations Descartes stated: "I am therefore, to speak precisely, only a thinking being...I am not this self assemblage of members which is called a human body. " (II) Descartes taught that he was primarily a 'reasoning being', and this reason had no sex, it was neither male nor female. So in the Cartesian separation of rationality from materiality, and identification of a primacy in human identity of the reason, we have a new rationale for sex unity that shifts the foundation away from a Platonic concept of reincarnation of sexless soul, to a modern concept of rationality as the sole identifying characteristic of human life.

Post-Cartesian enlightenment sex unity theorists begin to appeal to reason as such for a defence for the equality and non differentiation of man and woman. This is significant because previous to Descartes I have not been able to find a single example of this method of argumentation on this particular subject. For example, in the works of Isotta Nogarola, Christine de Pisan, Castiglioni, or Lucrezia Marinelli all argumentation for the equality of woman and man is based on the observation of the senses, and appeal to Platonic and neo-Platonic authority. None appeal to reason as such.

In addition in the two significant modern texts written just prior to or contemporary with Descartes a similar phenomenon

occurs. Marie de Gournay le Jars (1566-1645), published in 1622 Egalité des hommes et des femmes and in 1626 Grief des Dames, and in both of these works she appeals to the philosophical authority of Plato and Socrates: "who allot women equal rights, faculties and functions in their Republics and everywhere else." (EHF 64) In a text entitled De ingenii muliebris ad doctrinum et meliores (The Learned Maid; or Whether a Maid may be a Scholar? A Logic Exercise) Maria van Schurman, a personal friend of Descartes used the scholastic method, based on Aristotelian logic, to prove that women can be scholars concluding: "The assertion may be proved both from the property of the form of this subject; or the rational soul; and from the very acts and effects themselves. For it is manifest that maids do actually learn arts and sciences." (LM 6-7) In her appeal to the rational soul, van Schurman begins to move into a post-Cartesian appeal to reason as such to defend the equality of the sexes.

The Cartesian philosopher François Poullain de la Barre (1647-1723) in his text of several hundred pages entitled De L'égalité des deux sexes (The Woman as Good as the Man: Or, the Equality of Both Sexes) gave many arguments for the physical, mental, and moral equality of men and women. He argued that while the body had certain sex differences related to reproduction, the spirit, brain and faculties were the same in women and men, and "they were equally capable of the same things." (WGM 66) He concluded : "In effect, we all (both men and women) have the same

right to truth, since the mind in all of us is alike capable to know it." (WGM 114) Poullain argues directly that the prejudice that men have against women educating their reason was simply a custom that should be overturned by this appeal to the common nature of the faculty of reason in all human beings. Reason becomes a key to open the locked door of the custom of sex polarity which blocked women's access to academic education.

The next Cartesian philosopher to invoke an appeal to reason to bring about a reformation in traditional sex polarity was Mary Astell (1688-1731) who proposed that an educational institution be established in England in her Serious Proposal to the Ladies, which would use the Cartesian method of deduction from first principles, employing the search for clear and distinct ideas and then moving to certain conclusions. She concluded that : "Custom cannot authorise a practice if reason condemns it." (SP 73) Once again reason is identified as the key to unlock the closed door of education. In a second text entitled An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex, published in 1696 Astell argued that she wanted not to defend as reverse sex polarity, but rather a sex unity theory and to raise the level of the female sex "to an equality at most with men." (DFS 7-8)

The following passage demonstrates Astell's capacity to argue against the custom traditional polarity by an appeal to an equality of rational soul: " To proceed therefore if we be

naturally defective, the defect must be either in soul or body. In the soul it can't be, if what I have heard some learned men maintain, be true, that all souls are equal and alike, and that consequently there is no such distinction, as male and female souls...Neither can it be in the body (if I may credit the report of learned physicians) for there is no difference in the organization of those parts, which have any relation to, or influence over the minds; but the brain, and all other parts...are contrived as well for the plentiful conveyance of spirits, which are held to be the immediate instruments of sensation, in women, as men. I see therrefore no natural impediment in the structure of our bodies; nor does experience, or observation argue any. We all use our natural faculties, as well as men, nay and our rational too." (DFS 32-3)

This first phase of the use of Cartesian arguments to support a sex unity position focused primarily on the category of wisdom. If women and men had the same capacity for reason, then they ought to have the same access to education. It should be noted in passing that all of the above authors were outside of academia; they all were writing again in a counter cultural environment to the academic context of university education in Europe. Christine de Pisan, for example, had been allowed to use the library of the University of Paris, and Maria van Schurman to listen to lectures in Holland sitting behind a closed curtain. But women had no free access to the dialogue and exchange that

naturally occurred in a university context. So the Cartesian dualistic metaphysics offered a framework in which to appeal to a reformation in educational structures using the key of human reason to open the locked door of custom.

The effect of the Cartesian Reformation on the philosophy of man and woman in the French Revolution

In the second half of the 18th century the major focus of arguments about the equality of women and men shifted from education and the category of wisdom to public action concomitant with a consideration of rights and the category of virtue. The question of a mother's and father's rights had been discussed previously by Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and John Locke (1632-1704), and they had projected an original state of nature in which women's and men's rights were equal but which had been shifted into a polarity model after the development of human law.

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) presented a renewed theory of sex polarity in which the two sexes understood to be significantly different, and in which the male was given the capacity for discursive reasoning, the female for intuitive reasoning, the male the public arena of activity as citizen and the propriety to rule, and the female the private arena of the home and the obligation to obey because of the limitations of her nature. In Emile he states: "In the union of the sexes each alike contributes to the common end, but in different ways. From this

diversity springs the first difference which may be observed between man and woman in their moral relations. The man should be strong and active; the woman should be weak and passive; the one must have both the power and the will; it is enough that the other should offer little resistance." (E 322-3)

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) appeared to agree with Rousseau's model of intellectual capacities when he argued in his aesthetic text: "Her [woman's] philosophy is not to reason, but to sense." (OFBS 95) and in his Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals that women do not have the capacity for an ethics based on discursive reasoning. There is also the story that the only day Kant missed his usual 4PM walk in Koenigsburg was when he was deeply immersed in a copy of Rousseau's Emile. Surprising perhaps is the fact that one of Kant's closest friends, Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel (1741-1796), the mayor of Koenigsburg, wrote a several hundred page text entitled in its English translation On Improving the Status of Women in which he argued, using the Cartesian method of appeal to reason as well as appeal to the observation of the senses, to defeat a wide range of arguments in support of traditional sex polarity, and to support the fundamental equality of men and women.

However, it was the revolutions in governments in the United States and France which most strongly brought out the way in which the appeal to reason, the Cartesian premise, formed the

basis for a new theory of sex identity.\* In 1787 Condorcet (1743-1794) directly raised the question of the relation of woman to the American Revolution: "Is it not as sensitive beings, reasonable, having moral ideas, that men have rights? Women must then have them absolutely the same and yet never, in any so-called free constitution, have women exercised the right of citizenship." (LBNH 281) Then, after the French revolution, in a document published posthumously Condorcet sought to defend woman's public role on the basis of her capacity to reason: "But the rights of men result simply from the fact that they are rational, sentient beings, susceptible of acquiring ideas of morality, and or reasoning concerning those ideas. Women having then, the same qualities, have necessarily the same rights." (SAFDC 5)

There were also political treatises written by women themselves which also partook of this Cartesian reformation. Three such examples stand out. In the first, Théroigne de Méricourt, acting as an armed military leader in the storming of the Bastille on July 14, 1789 stated: "In order to realize our rights and obligation we must take reason for arbiter." (in Sokolnikova 26) Next, Olympe de Gouges, the pen name for Marie Gouze (1748-1793) wrote a text entitled Declaration of Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen in which she argued that the laws prohibiting women from public participation in citizenship must be reformed by "the laws of nature and reason." (DF art iv) In

\* July 4,  
 U.S. constitution 1776  
 Publish constitution May 3, 1791  
 French constitution 1791



the postscript to her document she claimed that the "tocsin of reason is being heard throughout the whole universe... Courageously oppose the force of reason to the empty pretensions of superiority; unite yourselves beneath the standards of philosophy." She concluded that citizenship "must be the same for all."

→ The most significant woman philosopher to follow the Cartesian method of argumentation was Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) who wrote her reflections on the french revolution entitled A Vindication of the Rights of Man. Then she wrote another text entitled A Vindication of the Rights of Woman in which she argued against Rousseau, Burke, and reflected on the developments in the revolution which led to the exclusion of women from citizenship. She argued that if women had "a parity of reason" with man then she should have full citizenship. Men must prove that women "want reason" and they must recognize that "reason calls for this respect, and loudly demands justice for one half of the human race." (VRW 5-6) \*

However, in a most interesting passage Wollstonecraft argues: "I love man as my fellow; but his scepter, real, or usurped, extends not to me, unless the reason of an individual demands my homage; and even then the submission is to reason, and not to man." (VRW 37) In this passage we can see the sliding effect of sex unity, in an over emphasis on rationality to the

\* while the main direction of Wollstonecraft's philosophy is towards sex-unity, she does have some suggestions of fractional sex complementarity in the categories of wisdom and virtue.

exclusion of materiality leads to a situation in which individuality ceases to be important. Instead of obedience being a self gift out of choice from one person to another, it becomes a submission to an impersonal theory of rationality. In this shift the limitations of the Cartesian reformation begin to be more obvious.

Once the mind has been separated from the body, as it was by Descartes in his claim that 'I am only a thinking being' a fragmentation in the human being occurs. This fragmentation, so common to the sex unity position, with its devaluation of the body, leads to a disappearance of any meaningful differentiation between the sexes. In the situation of the French Revolution, for example, Théroigne de Méricourt was violently attacked and beaten by a mob of women who disapproved of one of her political decisions. She never recovered and spent the remainder of her years mentally insane. Marie Gouze, was guillotined during the Reign of Terror on the Place de la Révolution for her support for the monarchy. These two women experienced the effects of Reason, cut off from the body of the common good, and no longer able to integrate passions of anger, greed, and revenge, or the ideas of equality, liberty, and fraternity.

In closing, a simple analogy comes to mind about the philosophical significance of the Cartesian reformation. There are two symbols that are commonly associated with the French

Revolution: the key to the bastille and the guillotine. If we think of the association of the Cartesian postulate of reason, and its relation to his dualism of mind and body, in which the mind is given an isolated and superior role to the body, some cultural insights may occur in relation to the philosophy of woman and man. First of all, it is not coincidental that precisely during this post-Cartesian time in history that the guillotine itself was invented. It was the perfect instrument to sever the head from the body, resulting in death. At the same time, there was a fundamental truth that was also discovered in this post-Cartesian period, and that was the similarity of the faculty of reason in men and women, and its usefulness in serving as the key to unlock the prejudices of past custom which had limited women in achieving their full educational potential.

It was earlier said that reason was analogous to the key to the Bastille which had 'imprisoned' women by the imbalance in the philosophy of sex polarity. Reason, however, when cut off from materiality, or the mind from the body, acts more like a guillotine than a key, and it can result in a kind of sterility or death in thought and action. The philosophy of sex unity, which began by being so effective against the theory of sex polarity, lost its effectiveness because its starting point was erroneous. Paradoxically, the Aristotelian and Hildegardian and starting point of the integration of mind and body, with the soul as the form and act of the body will ultimately provide the

foundation for a theory of sex complementarity in which equality and significant differentiation are both held in balance. So we have to consider the appeal to reason more as a key and less as a guillotine, if we will be successful in defending an accurate philosophy of sex identity, or what I call integral sex complementarity. This will be the subject of lecture 3.

Sr. Prudence Allen, RSM, PhD

Associate Professor

Department of Philosophy

Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

May 8, 1991